



# Wee Recycling Center

## Goals:

-  To establish an area where children can become familiar with recyclable and reusable items.
-  To practice recycling and reusing procedures.

## Background:

You can teach your children to be Wee Recyclers by encouraging them to practice reducing, reusing and recycling every day. Setting up a recycling center in your facility will give your children the practice they need. Use the center as a focal point for your recycling efforts. Use it also as a place to collect recyclables and to store items that can be reused for crafts and dramatic play. The Wee Recycling Center will be an excellent hands-on learning station for your Wee Recyclers.

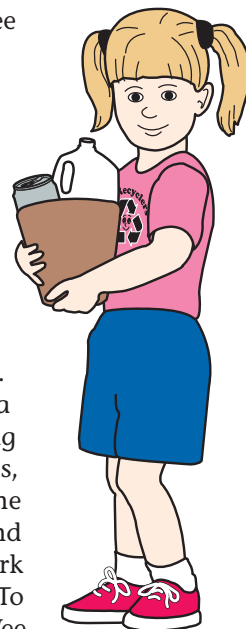
## Materials:

Collection containers for recyclables (boxes, bags or bins)  
Recycling labels for containers \*  
Recycling labels (take-home) \*  
"Recycle – It's Easy" poster \*  
"Recycle – It's Easy" (take-home) \*  
"Recycle – It's Easy" directions \*  
Wee Recycling Center sign \*  
Storage containers/shelves for reusable items  
Recyclable and reusable items (See Parent Letter following this section.)  
Magnet

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**, <http://dnr.wi.gov/eeek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

## Setting Up Your Wee Recycling Center:

1. Check with your local government or recycling center to find out which items are recyclable in your community and how they should be sorted and prepared. Use this information to determine the number and type of containers needed for your Wee Recycling Center. Take the "Recycle – It's Easy" poster and mark the "yes" and "no" box for recyclability in your community.
2. Select an area for your Wee Recycling Center that will accommodate the recycling containers in addition to shelves or other containers for storing reusable items. This area should be easily accessible to children. It should have enough wall space to hang the Wee Recycling Center sign and the "Recycle – It's Easy" poster. You may want to include a shelf or table to keep recycling related books (for suggestions, see "Resources" section at the end of the guide), games and puzzles for children to work on during their free time. To increase success with your Wee Recycling Center, make sure that garbage bins are also located within the center. To reduce mix-ups and maximize participation, recycling containers should always be paired with garbage cans.
3. Gather the containers and/or shelves needed. Attach the recycling labels to the collection containers. Hang up the Wee Recycling Center sign and the "Recycle – It's Easy" poster.
4. Collect a variety of materials that can be recycled in your community for your children to practice sorting: paper, glass, plastics with different number symbols, aluminum and tin cans, etc. Choose glass jars and bottles that are small and have thick walls (medicine and extract bottles); these should not break easily. Make sure that all items have been thoroughly cleaned.
5. Take the magnet, punch a hole in the corner of it and then attach it to the tin can collection container with a piece of string. Use this to test for steel products.



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## How to Use the Wee Recycling Center:

1. Use the Wee Recycling Center for children to practice their sorting skills. Have a few examples of each recyclable item available for children to remove from containers and put back into the appropriate container. If space is limited, the sorting containers can be as small as five-gallon ice cream buckets or shoe boxes.
2. Numerous activities in the Wee Recyclers Activity Guide use the Wee Recycling Center as well. To prepare for other activities, start with setting up your classroom's center.
3. Use the "Recycle – It's Easy" poster to teach children how to prepare items to be recycled. Have them pretend to rinse items, remove labels and flatten if appropriate. In addition to being a good teaching tool for you, the poster also serves as a guide and a reminder for the children.
4. Discuss the expected behavior of children who play in the Wee Recycling Center. Explain to children that glass and metal can be dangerous if not handled properly. Check aluminum and tin cans for sharp edges. If the ends of tin cans have been removed, use a hammer or file to flatten or smooth rough metal edges around the rim of the can. Do not allow the removed ends of tin cans to be in the collection boxes; they are too sharp. Keep them in a separate container out of the reach of children.
5. Use this opportunity to teach children about magnets. Explain that a magnet attracts some kinds of metal but not all kinds. Aluminum and steel are two different kinds of metals used to make cans. A magnet will attract steel, but not aluminum. When children are sorting cans, they can use the magnet to test whether the can is steel or aluminum. Steel cans are often called "tin" cans because they are covered with a thin coating of shiny tin.
6. An area of confusion to some children is plastic. If you are in a community that only collects plastic bottles and jugs made from #1 or #2 plastic, some children believe that all materials must have a #1 or #2 on the bottom to be recycled. They will begin checking steel cans or glass jars for the numbers, and seeing none, will decide that the item belongs in the trash. Make sure your children know that only plastic will have the numbers.
7. Use the center to collect items that can be reused in crafts. Store the reusable items in separate containers. Attach a picture or an actual sample of the item to the outside of the container for easy identification. Ask facility staff, parents and local businesses to help by donating items for projects and activities.

As children bring in items, they can sort the items in the appropriate containers. Use the Parent Letter included at the end of this section to inform parents of the new Wee Recycling Center and to encourage their participation and donation of items.

8. When making crafts from reusable and recyclable items, remind children that they are using something that may otherwise have ended up in the trash. Tell them they are doing a good thing by reusing, and therefore, reducing the amount of trash that would end up in the landfill.
9. Make copies of the recycling labels and "Recycle – It's Easy" directions for each child to take home and share with family members. (For further instruction, see the section, "Sorting Together At Home.")

## Going Beyond:

-  If flattening plastic bottles is appropriate in your community, let children help crush the bottles using their hands and feet.
-  Purchase a simple, inexpensive can crusher. Properly secure the device to a table or wall. Instruct your children how to use it safely.
-  Encourage dramatic play. Suggest that your children pretend to be recycling truck drivers picking up items at homes and businesses and taking them to the recycling center. At the recycling center, separate the different items into their correct containers. Or, pretend to be a trash collector picking up trash on the way to a landfill. Use boxes for trucks.
-  When you discuss what items the recyclables will turn into, post pictures of the final products on the bins into which the items are sorted. Also, post a picture of a landfill (found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**) on the trash container as a visual reminder of where items placed in that container will go.
-  Visit a real recycling center. Afterwards, discuss with children the work and procedures that occur in the center. You may want to include more dramatic play props in your Wee Recycling Center. Add the following to your center: work gloves or plastic gloves for handling recyclables, hard hats, safety glasses, a weighing scale, cash register and play money.













## Dear Parent,

Since recycling is an important way to reduce the volume of household waste that goes into landfills, we have set up our very own Wee Recycling Center in our facility. In this center, your child practices how to prepare items for recycling and how to reuse things. We need you to help us collect certain items for upcoming projects and activities. Please have your child help you collect and thoroughly clean the items listed below and donate them to our Wee Recycling Center.



**Thank you,**

### The items we are seeking include:

-  A variety of different sized boxes (cereal, shoe, food boxes, gift, etc.)
-  Rolls from toilet paper, paper toweling, food wraps, gift wrapping
-  Egg cartons (paper and polystyrene)
-  Milk cartons (different sizes of paper and plastic)
-  Old magazines, greeting cards, wrapping paper, junk mail
-  Polystyrene meat packing trays
-  Margarine/butter tubs
-  Yogurt containers (especially with clear lids)
-  Coffee cans
-  Plastic food containers with covers
-  Cardboard pizza backings
-  Fabric, yarn and ribbon scraps
-  Buttons, beads, dried beans
-  Baby food jars
-  Spools
-  Old pipe cleaners and straws
-  Old paper plates
-  Other: \_\_\_\_\_